

PROBLEMATIZING SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE OF COLONIALISM ON POST-COLONIAL THEORIES

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Abstract

In this study, historical and sociological discourse of colonialist movements will be critically analyzed by referring post-colonial theories. In doing so, it is proposed to shed light on the process of colonialism, its reason, consequences and impact on colonized territories in the light of social science discipline.

In order to generate a systematic study, the issue problematized will be examined in an historical approach. That is why, the text will include some sub-titles that might show the development and status of colonialist discourse in social science (and specifically sociology) literature. After that, some deconstructive theories on colonialist discourse will be mentioned in consideration of new/contrary arguments on race and culture. At the end of the study, Orientalism as one of the well-known colonialist discourse of Western dominance will be discussed.

This paper doesn't propose to give detailed information on colonialist movements in an historical context. It, rather, proposes to underline the Western view of the World and movements on colonized countries encouraged by these view. That is why, throughout the study, modern Western theories will be attributed to colonialist approaches and actions.

Keywords: Colonialism, post-colonialism, orientalism, post-colonialist discourse

Introduction

It should be noted that this paper is not a historical review on colonialist policies and movements. It mainly aims at exploring the traces of modernity on colonialist ideas and movements, instead. In other words, instead of exploring the colonization process of some countries, theoretical background of colonialist idea, which is produced by modern philosophy and sociology, will be explored. Then, criticisms and deconstructive theories against dominant discourse of colonialism will be outlined.

In the first part, some philosophers who define and explain 'society' in a philosophical context will be examined. By mentioning them, it is planned to illustrate the relationship between their theories on social contract and formations of modern discourse. Locke, Rousseau and Hobbes, in this respect, will dominate this section. This part actually aims at showing the origins of Western domination on social science and origins of colonialist movements in terms of social contract and the concept of 'necessity'.

Second part will mainly deal with classical sociology, which could be attributed to studies and arguments of early period sociologist such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Durkheim, for example, will be mentioned in relation to his studies on religion. Weber, on the other hand, focuses on a tradition in Christianity, will be discussed in order to illustrate the origins and forms of modern capitalism. Lastly, Marx, who always refers to past by analyzing economic relationships, especially slaver and feudal Europe, and capitalism, which demonstrates itself in 19th century, will be examined. Especially history of capitalism that interprets every society in terms of class struggle (Marx & Engels 1967, p.79) will be questioned.

Western way of thinking and ignorance of non-Western or non-positivistic knowledge will be shown as “the ‘channels’ in which externalization produces an objective world” (Berger & Luckmann 2009, p.51). By doing so, intervention on knowledge and history by modern/classical sociology will be clarified. This will bring the study to ideals of colonialist perspective and movements.

After the section touches upon colonial policies and their relationship by classical sociology and positivist approach, post-colonial studies which criticize the definitions of West, non-West, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. will be explained as the fourth and the main part of this study. By doing so, modern sociology will be problematized by focusing on post-colonialist studies.

Last part will question Orientalism as modernist interpretation way of East by West and as the literature that reveals some methodological and cultural problems. This literature will be attributed to post-colonial studies, as well.

Formation of Dominant Sociological Perspectives in Europe

It is possible to find the origins of sociology in the studies of some thinkers who contributed to philosophy by their theories. These theories are based on the notions of social contract and human nature. Shortly, Hobbes asserts that people who live together need an authority in order to sustain their existence (Gauthier 2000). In the absence of an authority, humans cannot be able to satisfy their needs and provide a healthy togetherness. Because of this obligation, he offers the idea of state as a regulatory power over individuals for their needs and sustainable social life (Delanty 2000). Locke, on the other hand, pays attention to private property, which leads people to make a contract with an institution (Delanty 2000). Lastly; Rousseau claims that people, who were born into society as free, get chained in the socialization process. To decrease the restriction and to live safely in society, people share their power with others, so freedom is provided by an authority that is set up by a social contract (Delanty 2000). As you shall see, the notion of social contract idealizes a relationship between individuals and society by suggesting both authoritarian and libertarian background. These also bring us to confrontational and functionalist approach. Socio-political base of 19th century's Western societies appears at this point. It prepares an infrastructure for sociology as an independent science. That is why; it is not a coincidence that foundation of sociology is addressed with progression of modernity in 19th century. This socio-political base of modernity prepares a criterion model that recognizes progression model in the West and basically, Enlightenment process is the elementary form of perspectives that shapes the modern social sciences (Hall 2006).

Modern Sociology and Foundations of ‘Reasons’ for Post-Colonial Studies

When looking at Durkheim's studies such as *Division of Labour in Society* (1997) and *Rules of Sociological Methodology* (1938), it is possible to discover some traces of social contract. Division of labour and new solidarity type, which is organic one, could refer to a contractual situation. Sociology, in this respect becomes a key element for this contract in Durkheim's view. For him, as a positive science, sociology should emphasize and cure the crises that emerged in Europe during the modernity period (Pope 2008). If it is remembered that modernity is problematized by sociologist in terms of major changings, sociology appears as an endeavour on European social life, which witnesses a new sociological background. Durkheim's position, in this respect, seems not only to theorize a new sort of social contract, but also draw a picture for current situation in modernity.

When Durkheim maintains his works, he benefits from the positivist methodology, which tends to explain social phenomena under the rules of natural science and searches for absolute correlation between them. As in *Suicide: a sociological study* (1952), in general, Durkheim emphasizes a scientific result between suicide rates and social anomie. This

positivistic tendency could be observed in various theories released in 19th century. Perhaps, it wouldn't be wrong to assert that positivism was one of the unavoidable elements of prevailing paradigm, which is explained by Kuhn (1996), for social science. And perhaps Durkheim was, as a modern time sociologist, interested in abstract notions by attributing them positivist-secular perspective when explaining the relationship between social phenomena. For instance, in his study about elementary forms of religious life, he claims that religion, which is made by individuals in social groups, is an institution that keeps society together, feeds common sense and adapts the society to external conditions by setting up a custom (Lukes 1973). At this point, we can see a general approach demonstrated by modernist perspectives. Even religion could be examined in terms of a social need, and religious phenomena could be based only on sociological perspectives. Durkheim's assertion creates a similarity between primitive religions and religions in modern period (Lukes 1973). In addition, religion is an empirical phenomenon that is understood as "a unified system of beliefs and practices" (Wallace & Hartley 1988, p.98). Durkheim, as a theoretician of Europe where secularism arises day by day, emphasizes religion as an observable social institution.

Marx, on the other hand, approaches historical progression in terms of two main classes, which are bourgeois and proletariat (Marx & Engels 1967). History of humanity testifies the struggle between two classes and 19th century's capitalism, which is seen in Europe, illustrates the most obvious competition. In relation to the main argument of this paper, Marx argues that capitalism has to survive by distributing itself outside of Europe. That is why, colonialist movements, which will be mentioned below, are inevitable consequences of capitalism (Hall 1994). This perspective seems to be a theoretical approval of colonialist movements in non-Western world. Even though Marx is a theorist who thinks and writes against capitalism, the argument about inevitability separates the world into two parts, West and non-West, in terms of progression and diffusion of capitalism. The last thing about Marxist theory will be mentioned here is his argumentation regarding Asian countries' production and consumption style. Shortly and superficially, "Asiatic-type societies, he argues, cannot develop into modern ones because they lack certain preconditions. Therefore, only the introduction of dynamic elements of western capitalism can trigger development" (Hall 1994, p.316). For a general evaluation, Marx partly constitutes his theory by determining the boundaries of West and non-West.

The last classical sociologist plays a role in this section is Max Weber. Even though Weber's theories and scientific methodology seems different from those of Marx and Durkheim, because of some of his arguments, we can count him as a sociologist who constitutes the identification of West and non-West. Basically, his analysis on rationalism and theorization of capitalism in terms of Protestant ethic gives some clues about his idealization in favour of Western societies and modernist approach.

Even though Weber is a theorist who opposes evolutionary theses on history and social life, he attributes formation of modernity and functions of modern institutions to rational action as a typology of the period (Roth 1985). It could be noticed that rationalism refers to an evolution observed in Western societies and institutions. The historical and religious outline of rationalism that was propounded by Weber disregards other religions and cultures. In the process of capitalism and modernity, Weber, for example, doesn't mention Islam (Hall 1996). In Weber's view, in this respect, if there is a society or organization which is defined as rational, it must include the reflections of Protestantism.

Secondly, and in combination with rationalism, definitions of capitalism by Weber brings us to another West-oriented approach as regards modern World. Weber theorizes "ethic of a religious belief and spirit of an economic system" (Luethy 1970, p.124) in a historical relationship rather than evolutionary explanations. Most importantly, Weber claims that thanks to obvious productivity, rational-modern capitalism performs the most progressive system that humanity has created so far (Giddens 1971). At this point, similarity among two

classical sociologists might be observed. Even though Weber emphasizes religious affect and give importance to rational action in the formation of capitalism (Munch 1988), he claims a progression on historical process when explaining this economic system just like Marx did. This point also gives some clues about theoreticians of modernity and their similar points of views.

To sum up, Enlightenment process and formation of knowledge prepares an atmosphere for Western studies. Major novelties in Western Europe direct thinkers to explain this situation in historical base and history of society/humanity is written according to expectations and movements of Western-capitalist societies. Even some theoreticians such as Marx and proponents, who oppose rising and spreading of capitalism, release their theories according to progressive perspective. This approach is one of the starting points that pushes thinkers to focus on post-colonial studies. As it will be seen in next section, the main objection of post-colonial studies derives from West oriented or/and integrative nature of modern sociology over humanity.

General Evaluation Regarding Post-Colonial Studies and Their Origins in Sociology

Theoretically, post-colonialism is a process that objects to the assumption of understanding cultural practices of various cultures from a colonialist perspective. More broadly, it keeps “a variety of practices, performed within a range of disciplinary fields in a multitude of different institutional locations around the globe” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, p.5). It holds deterritorialisation and decentralisation of cultures around location or place (Grossberg 1996). Post-colonial studies have been attributed to marginalized groups such as women, homo-sexual, lesbian, cultural and ethnic groups (Gandhi 1998) that are omitted by Western history. However, a more general perspective might be drawn by looking at the meeting of Western countries with non-Western cultures after geographical explorations. Briefly, in 16th century, West came into close contact with ‘other’, settled down near them, and learned living like a native and by the help of technology, they started to rule the countries they had discovered. In time, because they were motivated by the ambition of wealth and domination, they did not hesitate to benefit the technological and material supplements of colonized countries (Parekh, 1997). Moreover, colonized groups or people are expected to get used to life style of colonialist country and to become “whither” (Fanon 2009, p.338) day by day. However, this process has been defined by Western resources in a peaceful way. Utilizing from non-Western countries by exploiting their resources, their own sources, is hidden under the discourse of ‘helping non-Western countries to improve themselves economically and politically’. Especially authoritarian and definitive texts regarding human history produce supremacy for West over the rest of the World (Gandhi 1998). As an intellectual attempt, colonialist texts had been fed by journalism and authors who wrote their memories (Moore-Gilbert 1997). This is the main point where post-colonial objections rise. Edward Said, who is one of the most important thinkers of Orientalism, criticizes representational assertion of colonialism over non-Western regions and it is addressed by Said as being a totalising and unified reading of imperialism (Gandhi 1998, p.77). Post-colonial studies, in this respect, could be seen epistemological, ideological and methodological opposition against modernist/colonial discourse. In other words, t post-colonial studies are the process of taking notice of others, which is the one of the elementary rules of social life (Shilling & Mellor 2001). Post-colonialism, at this point, is defined as salvation from the colonial syndrome (Hall 1996). This syndrome, for a sense, is based on a distinction, emphasized by philosophers, artists, politicians and political theorists, administrators, economists, etc. who rule colonial geographies (Said 2006). They were, interestingly, not doubtful about the superiority of European culture and even European race over non-Europeans (Parekh 1997). For this reason, hegemonic role of inter-disciplinary endeavour of colonialism over colonized cultures and territory should be considered. This general sight could remind us of modernity and its

hegemonic structure over non-Western societies. It wouldn't be wrong to assert that post-colonial studies are a discrediting process against the project of European Enlightenment (Loomba 1998).

Now, perspectives of classical sociologists, Weber, Marx and Durkheim, and formation of sociological thought could be revived. It is obvious that “during the period of colonial expansion Europe had at least three influential thought that were committed to the ideals of human unity, equality, freedom...” and additionally “Christianity, Liberalism... and Marxism from the last few decades of 19th century onwards” (Parekh 1997, p.173). Briefly, rationalization process drawn by Weber shows itself in colonialist approach. Modern age represents a definite rational mechanism. Marxism, interestingly, seems another reference point for colonialist movement by suggesting Asiatic type production and societies and their insufficient economic run. That is why, it could be confirmed that “both Weber and Marx organize their arguments in terms of broad, simple, contrasting oppositions which mirror quite closely the West-Rest, civilized-rude, developed-backward opposition...” (Hall 1994, p.316). Lastly, post-colonial studies both refuses and enlarges the idea of solidarity in Durkheim's point of view by suggesting a new international division of labour regarding de-centralization of capitalism and information technologies (Hall 1996). Post-colonial studies not only seem as an opposition against classical sociologists of modern time, but they also object to philosophers of early modern period who illustrated the idea of absolute human nature and social contract. This will be detailed in the next sections.

Re-discovering Race and Culture

Previous part reminded that every step taken by West over non-Western geography refers to modernist and western idealization process. Gandhi, Parekh, Loomba and the others tend to illustrate the implementations regarding colonialism by emphasizing past and today. Actually, their studies are automatically named post-colonial studies. That is why; when classifying texts regarding post-colonialism, we could mainly observe the notion of race, cultural studies and Orientalism. All of these emerge from an objection against the project of modernity and spreading modern civilization over the non-Western areas of the World. In this part, subjects mentioned in previous statement will be examined specifically.

First of all, post-colonial studies highly refer cultural studies and the notion of race. As Bhabha (2006, p.221) extracted from Foucault, race, which sets up a historical temporality, is suggested by Western civilization as being an indicator of superiority of White Westerns and it creates a colonial metropolis. This emphasizes an omission process of non-Western cultures. Definition of them is subjected under the eyes of West. The same West has the power to use the technology, science and hegemonic discourse. This priority leads non-Western to keep racist approach in modern period. For some post-colonialist thinkers such as Bhabha (2006) racism is not only specific conception of aristocracy that emerges from Europe, but is also a result of liberal humanism that constitutes ideological aspiration under an imagined community. Besides socio-political interpretation, science is used by West in order to contribute to race and racism. As Loomba (1998) indicated, some anatomic structure of human body such as nose, hair style, skin colour, head bone, etc. had been cited as the most accurate differences when distinguishing races in favour of Western types. Moreover, because of their social and psychical belonging to West, Western scientists, who produce dominant knowledge, couldn't criticize the scientific 'facts' about the supremacy of Western races. In addition, knowledge produced by non-Western origins had been refused as being non-scientific (Loomba 1998). This is one of the main reasons that make the people of colonized geography alienated. As Spivak states (1999) scientific studies that support the dominant trend caused a failure of self-cognition over the colonized geography and produces people alienated to their own culture. Additionally, it is remarkable that post-colonial studies regarding alienation also remark local resources and materials used colonialist power. In here,

there is a combination between locality and Western ideas that are used in order to benefit from colonized lands and cultures (Loomba 1998). To sum up, exploitation maintained by West on colonized areas is not only seen on natural resources, but is seen on local elements and culture.

Orientalism as a Basic Element of Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Literature

Briefly, Orientalism is “[W]estern style of dominating, re-structuring, and having authority over Orient” (Said Harlow & Carter 1999, p.49). As you might see, it is one of the basic elements of colonial discourse and settlement over Eastern countries. Studies about orientalism, on the other hand, reflect post-colonial approaches and criticisms on colonialist movement. That is why; it could be seen as a political or historical discipline.

Just like the other elements of colonialism, Orientalism divides the earth into two parts: West and East. In the literature of Orientalism, East or Orient is conceptualized instead of non-West. Moreover, Orient (or the other part of Earth) seems more active than the image of non-West. Orient helps to define Europe itself by the help of images, cultural staff, language, etc. of other. In relation to this, for an Orientalist, East is also an integral part of Western civilization that should be domesticated and ruled by West (Said 2006). East, in this respect, is re-constituted and re-discovered both as a territory and as a culture from the view point of West. Hence, we can claim that Orientalism is an extensive narrative regarding East in the light of modernization and Westernization. This brings Bhabha’s (2006, p.133) “story metaphor” into the mind, which explains the formation of dominant modernist thought. However, in terms of Orientalist settlement, modernist story changes its contact area by heading towards Eastern territory.

Besides narration and diffusion maintained by West, Said’s assertion regarding Orientalism moves one step further and reminds Foucault’s (2006, p. 25) studies about modernization process:

“Without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage –and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period”.

Foucault illustrates the relationship between colonialist movements and Orientalist approach. Colonies over the Earth are ruled not only by guns, but also politics and epistemological hegemony created by multi-disciplinary approach. It refers to Hobbes’s main argument regarding social contract mentioned earlier in this study. Accordingly, societies assign a regulatory power (which was Leviathan in Hobbes’ argument) in order to organize the society for a peaceful atmosphere. In Orientalist context, Leviathan replaces colonialist powers on Earth. East, which is not able to use their resources efficiently and cannot organize their social life properly, is managed by West.

Orientalism as a historical discipline holds many different aspects such as journalism, mystification, etc. Additionally, Islam is taken as an issue by Orientalist literature in terms of being a cultural organization. As Nash (2009) extracted from Farrukh, even the most tolerant non-Muslim writers on Islam perceive this religion as a process of civilization, cultural or social organization and prophet of Islam could be a leader, a role model or an authority, but not a real prophet. This extreme example could help us to think the limits of Orientalism. In addition to recent studies, Durkheim’s *Intrinsic Forms of Religious Life* study could be remembered. In his study, Durkheim asserts that religion is not something which is created supernaturally, but it is a social institution produced by society (Jones 1986). This could provide further evidence about the relationship between modernist thought and colonial discourse. In addition to ontological discourse on Islam, Orientalist approach expects Islam to adapt itself into the Modern world by using materials, ideas and life styles of West. Even

European Muslim Communities question that whether Muslim's beliefs and practices are transforming into the Western style (Peter 2006).

Conclusion

In the light of the literature created by philosophers and classical sociologists who idealized a) knowledge, b) historical progression of societies by glorifying Westernization, it is not very difficult to see a dominant discourse leads colonialist powers to act as the masters of the rest of the world. Of course, this is not just because of the studies or encouragements on sociology, social philosophy or any theoretical explanation. However, sociological and political perspectives could give some clues about the origins of massive exploitation and massacre sustained over the colonialized countries. That is why, modernism, which is one of the main subjects of sociology, is not just a civilization process of Western countries. It, in this respect, shows itself as a reference point for colonialist countries. Every single notion and revised editions of the other notions such as 'rationalism', 'scientific knowledge', 'Protestantism', 'progression', 'evolution', etc. serves colonialism. In this study, this long process was tried to be show this long process. Post-colonialist studies have been partly examined by only mentioning culture, race and religion. Of course, there are much more basics and operation area of colonialism. Post-colonialist studies could be attributed to the other reference points such as women studies, hybridity, gay-lesbian studies, etc. However, in order to correlate modernism and post-colonial studies, it has been preferred to choose race, culture and prevailing discourse of modernity.

Lastly, if we remember that we are living in a post-colonial era, it could be distinguished that colonialism refers to "was" and post-colonialism focuses on "is" (Hall 1996, p.247). That is why post-colonial studies not only deal with colonialist movements in past, but also emphasize current situation on colonialized countries of the past. Criticizing modernity feeds 'is', which indicates that history is not a one way line. However, for social scientists, it shouldn't be forgotten that "[T]he processes of modernization are not unidirectional and irreversible" and "[T]here is not an objective set of values that define in an absolute sense what is modern..." (Tiryakian 1992, p.82).

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